

Statement on Signing the Valles Caldera Preservation Act*July 25, 2000*

I am very pleased to sign into law S. 1892, the "Valles Caldera Preservation Act." This legislation is the culmination of a gratifying cooperative effort with the Congress, led by Senator Bingaman, Senator Dominici, Representative Udall, and Representative Heather Wilson of New Mexico. Its enactment will permit us to protect over 95,000 acres of unique, irreplaceable land in northern New Mexico—one of my top conservation priorities—for future generations to enjoy.

Specifically, this Act authorizes the acquisition and preservation of nearly 95,000 acres in the Valles Caldera, New Mexico. It also permits the sale of about 5,000 acres, containing the headwaters of the Santa Clara Creek, to the Santa Clara Pueblo, to allow the Pueblo to protect its water quality and resource values. A separate title of the bill authorizes the proceeds from the sale or exchange of certain Federal lands identified by the Bureau of Land Management as surplus to be used to purchase and protect other lands with exceptional natural resource values.

The Valles Caldera is at the heart of the Jemez Mountains and is the site of perhaps the greatest of New Mexico's volcanic features. It also is home to a wide range of scenic, wildlife, cultural, and ecological resources, and provides incomparable scenic beauty and recreational potential. The importance of the preservation of the Valles Caldera lies in the unique combination of all of these features in a relatively pristine setting that is nevertheless close by, and accessible to, the people of New Mexico. It has remained intact as a single unit in private ownership since the original land grant in 1860. Known as Baca Ranch, it has been well managed for several decades and is an example of a sustainable working ranch.

The caldera is an enormous depression more than a half-mile deep and 15 miles wide that was created by a volcanic eruption over a million years ago. Secondary volcanic domes arise from the caldera floor to elevations as high as 11,000 feet. Its scenic qual-

ity—a large network of grassland and forested mountains, surrounded by the caldera rim—does not exist elsewhere in the Southwest. It provides habitat to a broad range of species, including one of the largest elk herds in the continental United States, black bear, mountain lion, Mexican spotted owl, goshawk, peregrine falcon, and Rio Grande cutthroat trout. Its vegetation reflects a high level of ecological diversity, and includes grasslands, ponderosa pine, spruce, Douglas fir, and aspen.

The Jemez Wild and Scenic River, which originates in the Caldera, as well as the San Antonio, Jaramillo, and La Jara Creeks, all have outstanding fishery resources. Baca Ranch also adjoins the Santa Fe National Forest and Bandelier National Monument, and its protection will enhance the values of those properties as well.

The special designation of the ranch as the Valles Caldera National Preserve will help ensure the protection of important scenic and natural values. Baca Ranch has been well managed by its current owners, who permit selective grazing, timber harvest, fishing, and hunting—all in a manner that respects and preserves the underlying resource. The bill creates a unique management structure for this unique property. A Board of Trustees, with each member providing a particular expertise in the range of issues raised by the management of this property, will make decisions about Baca Ranch in a process that fully involves the American public—the real owners of the land. It is my hope that a member of the Native American community in New Mexico be included on this Board. This legislation makes clear that the managers of this property will make resource protection a top priority, and that sustainable multiple uses and financial self-sufficiency will be pursued to the extent consistent with protection of these irreplaceable resources. The Baca Ranch is a working ranch today, and the goal is to make it a model of sustainable practices, ensuring resource protection and providing for public recreational uses.

The purchase of the Valles Caldera is one of the most significant Federal land acquisitions in recent history and is a prime example of what we can achieve through my Lands Legacy Initiative. The permanent funding

source for conservation that I am working with the Congress to provide will guarantee that places like the Valles Caldera will not disappear, but will be protected for all to enjoy. The acquisition of this irreplaceable resource has been a top conservation priority for my Administration and many in the Congress. This Act protects a magnificent natural resource for New Mexicans and all Americans, and we can all be proud of this legacy that we leave for generations to come.

William J. Clinton

The White House,
July 25, 2000.

NOTE: S. 1892, approved July 25, was assigned Public Law No. 106–248.

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July 25, 2000

I am very pleased today to sign bipartisan legislation authorizing protection of New Mexico's Baca Ranch as the new Valles Caldera National Preserve.

From time to time, we are presented with an opportunity to save a truly magnificent piece of America's rich natural endowment. Today we seize one such opportunity. At the heart of the scenic Jemez Mountains west of Santa Fe, the Baca Ranch contains the remarkable Valles Caldera—the collapsed crater of an ancient volcano—and sustains one of our Nation's largest wild elk herds. Thanks to the careful stewardship of the Dunigan family, this extraordinary landscape appears today much as it did when the first settlers arrived. And thanks to the bipartisan efforts of the New Mexico delegation, we will ensure that it remains healthy and whole for generations to come.

I commend the Dunigans, for offering us the chance to open this treasure to the American people; Senators Bingaman and Domenici, and Representatives Udall and Wilson, for helping to lead this historic conservation effort; and the leaders of the Santa Clara Pueblo, for sharing with us their reverence for this land.

Today's success should inspire us to work even harder to conserve America's natural

heritage. The acquisition of Baca Ranch was made possible with increased conservation funding I secured last year through my lands legacy initiative. I have proposed another significant increase in lands legacy funding for the coming fiscal year. Unfortunately, appropriations bills passed by both the House and the Senate would provide only a third of my request, cutting lands legacy funding considerably below this year's level. In addition, riders attached to several appropriations measures aim to cripple wildlife protections, surrender public lands to private interests, and hamper commonsense efforts to combat global warming. I urge Congress to drop these anti-environmental riders and to fully fund my Lands Legacy initiative.

Ultimately, our goal must be to establish permanent conservation funding so that each new generation will have the resources to protect other critical lands across America. I am very pleased that the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee today approved a version of bipartisan legislation passed overwhelmingly by the House that moves us closer to that goal. I am fully committed to working with Congress to create a lasting endowment to support Federal, State, and local conservation efforts. Let us work together, in the spirit of today's historic conservation achievement, to strengthen, not weaken, environmental protections.

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Statement on House of Representatives Action on New Markets, Empowerment Zone, and Community Renewal Legislation

July 25, 2000

I commend the House of Representatives for passing today the bipartisan new markets, empowerment zone, and community renewal legislation. At a time of unprecedented prosperity, too many Americans in our cities and rural areas still do not have access to investment capital and economic opportunity. This legislation will spur more private sector investment in these new markets so that all